

Watch Out for the Quiet Ones

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Watch Out for the Quiet Ones

by [ChillsofFire](#)

Summary

Life aboard the Lost Light is starting to return to normal, even with the duplicates from the Other universe still calling the ship home. Things are peaceful, and the bots from the Other place, still worn out from their newly ended war, are more than grateful for the unexpected vacation.

But when a drunken Whirl runs his mouth off to the wrong Cybertronian, he reopens wounds that the Others would rather have left alone...

Notes

The continuation that no one asked for! After writing my MegOp piece where my fic's cast is transported to the world of MTMTE, I wanted to see how the Lost Lighters would react to other aspects of The Enemy of My Enemy.

This was originally supposed to be a SoundStar-centric piece, but plot got in the way, so I'll be following up with a part two for them!

As spoiler free as possible for my ongoing fic

Can be read by itself, but I highly recommend reading the first piece in this accidental series first

Chapter 1

It happened too fast. No one could have seen it coming.

When Swerve eventually looked back at it later, he would compare the entire thing to a scene from an earth movie; the peaceful moment slowly cracking under one wrong-doing, the way time seemed to slow as horrible realization crossed over certain minds, the sudden explosion.

Yeah, just like in the movies...

Twenty-three days had passed since the *Lost Light* found itself hosting bots from the Other universe. They were still mysterious, but they were more settled now. They had developed their own routines on the ship, maybe even developed some light friendships. Megs at least seemed to enjoy talking to his double, and the Other Optimus.

Swerve still couldn't believe that they were a couple. And the others from that universe were so calm about it!

Everyone on board had questions, but Optimus and Megatron were the only ones who would answer them, and they dodged as many as they could. Ratchet kept the other Autobots from gossiping too much, and Starscream only rolled his optics and walked away when the subject was brought up. Soundwave probably had more information, but no one had found a way to get him to talk yet. Swerve had tried once or twice, but the intense silence, and the feeling that Soundwave was staring into his very soul from behind his mask, had unnerved him.

Swerve didn't try to have conversations with Soundwave anymore.

The novelty of the witnessed kiss was beginning to wear off, though. People still whispered about it, and they all still stared whenever Optimus and Megatron stood too close together, but they were moving on to other things; war stories, scar comparisons, asking about their personal doppelgangers from the other 'verse, all very common topics to discuss in the bar now.

Tonight was no different.

As usual, the three medics sat together, this time in a booth on the far wall. Probably comparing tales from school and the field.

Smokescreen sat with a small crowd, chattering about the war and the bots he'd met. He was young, probably hadn't met many people to be able to compare them to those who lived here, but he was energetic and curious, and willing to tell stories when prompted. It drew attention.

The Wreckers still claimed their same table. Whirl really seemed to like having Wheeljack and Bulkhead to talk to, which suited everyone else just fine. He was much more tolerable after boasting about his glory days with like-minded company.

Then there was the leadership; Megatron, Optimus, 'Megs', and Rodimus, with Ultra Magnus usually somewhere nearby. Tonight they stood together, a smile on most of their faces as Rodimus talked and talked and talked. He'd been quick to try to assert himself as *the* captain, especially when Megatron was around. Optimus offered him the respect he so obviously wanted, being careful not to refer to Megs as captain, co or otherwise, when Rodimus was within earshot. Megatron humored him, at the very least, though anyone who watched him for more than five

minutes could tell that Megatron found the entire 'captain/co-captain' feud nothing short of hilarious.

It was actually pretty entertaining to watch.

So Swerve served his drinks, and cleaned his bar top, and kept his head on a swivel, optics roaming from table to table, focusing in now and then to try to catch pieces of conversation. He enjoyed the people watching. Though he had to admit, having Smokescreen sitting down at a table, instead of at the bar, made things feel a little too quiet. Swerve was getting used to having him close by and talking.

"Hey, Swerve, I've got a favor to ask."

Swerve pulled himself away from the conversation Smokescreen was having, something about someone named Alpha Trion, and turned toward the voice, "What can I do for you, Bulkhead?"

Bulkhead set his empty glass on the bar top, "I've got to stretch my legs. Do me a favor, don't let Jackie drink too much while I'm gone."

Swerve glanced behind Bulkhead, toward the table where Whirl and Wheeljack were still talking. Well, Whirl seemed to be talking. Loudly. With a lot of exaggerated hand motions that made him waver where he stood. Wheeljack looked like a carved statue in comparison. "He doesn't look like he's had that much..."

"He hasn't. It's just...it's kind of an off day for him, and I don't want him to get any bad habits. Just...don't let him get overcharged. Please?"

"Everything okay?" Swerve picked up the used glass, dipping it in the sink of hot cleanser before working his cloth over its surface.

"Yeah, yeah everything's fine. I just want it to stay that way."

There was an edge of worry in Bulkhead's voice, and in his optics when he looked over his shoulder toward his partner. Swerve had picked up on a pattern there. Wheeljack seemed to get a lot of worried looks. Swerve was *dying* to know what was going on, but he never seemed to get the chance to properly ask.

"No problem. I'll cut him off when I cut Whirl off here in a minute. He's definitely had too much, and I don't need those kinds of problems tonight."

"Thanks, Swerve," Bulkhead smiled, then turned to make his way to the door. Swerve followed him with his optics, mostly as an excuse to check out the rest of the room. The door slid open, and as Bulkhead stepped out, Soundwave slipped inside, quiet as a shadow, as usual.

"You and Optimus enjoy discussing your time as Prime. I think I need another drink."

Swerve turned his attention to the leadership crew just in time to see Megatron extending his arm toward the bar, his attention turning to Megs in silent invitation.

The two ex-warlords stepped away, leaving Optimus to hold Rodimus' attention. Though he didn't seem to mind all that much, if the way he turned back to Rodimus, giving him his full attention, was anything to go by.

"Do you have to deal with that often?" Megatron set his glass down in front of Swerve, offering him a small nod as it was taken.

“Every day,” Megs took a breath, shaking his head a bit even as he smiled. “He means well, really. But...Primus...”

“I understand entirely.”

Swerve stepped away to refill Megatron’s glass. Not long ago, if someone had told Swerve that he would be standing within ten feet of not one, but two Megatrons, he would have laughed, and then had nightmares for weeks. Now here he was, mixing drinks for one Megatron while calling the other “captain”. Life was strange.

“You know I have to ask.”

“Oh do you?”

Megs only smiled, glancing toward Optimus before meeting his double’s gaze, “Fell back into old habits, hm?”

Megatron rolled his optics, but Swerve could see his lips twitching as he handed him his new drink, “You’re just as curious, aren’t you?”

“Well, since you asked,” Swerve flashed his most charming smile, and Megatron snorted into his drink.

“And if I tell you, will the rest of the ship know all my secrets by tomorrow?”

“I’m offended!” Swerve touched his chest, trying his best to look hurt. “I’m a bar tender; we’re made to listen to secrets. My lips are sealed!”

Megatron looked toward Megs, who only smiled wider, “I can neither confirm nor deny.”

“Oh, fine. Fine!” Megatron lowered his glass and leaned his hip against the bar. “Ask your questions.”

And there it was; the peaceful scene set, perfect for breaking.

Swerve set his servos on the bar, eager to know exactly what had happened, questions burning on the tip of his glossa...

“What the frag is your problem?!”

Swerve recognized the sounds of a drunk and angry Whirl.

“Hey, calm down, you ran into him-“

“No, shut up! Hey! I’m talking to you! I want an apology!”

A glass shattered against the floor.

“Whirl, knock it off!”

Swerve looked over, just in time to see Wheeljack stumble back as Whirl shoved him aside, and just in time to see Whirl close one claw around Soundwave’s arm to try to yank him around.

Soundwave, showing more strength than Swerve would have thought him capable of, didn’t budge, though he froze where he stood, his arm still in Whirl’s grip.

Megatron set his glass down with a hard thud, “Don’t...”

“I’m talking to you! You hear me!? You deaf too!? Hey! Look at me and *spea*k, you fragging drone!”

“*Whirl!*” Wheeljack’s voice went from firm to angry, his optics hard as he stepped forward again and grabbed at his wrist. “Let go of him, now.”

Swerve didn’t know who to watch. Whirl’s optic glowed with excess charge, even narrowed as it was in his anger. Wheeljack’s expression was hard and cold, his grip tight around Whirl. And Soundwave...

Soundwave had gone absolutely still, somehow more still than he already had been. It was unnatural, unnerving, and Swerve was starting to get a bad feeling in his tank.

“Oh no...” Smokescreen’s quiet murmur reached Swerve’s audials with ease.

Oh no? What’s oh no?!

“Soundwave,” Megatron called out, his voice overly loud in the suddenly silent bar. He took a step forward, obviously seeing something that no one else was, “Soundwave, don’t!”

Several things happened all at once.

Megatron leapt forward, pushing himself off the bar in his hurry to get to Soundwave.

Wheeljack’s optics went wide, and he stepped forward, between Whirl and Soundwave, with one servo raised.

And Soundwave erupted in a flurry of movement. He yanked his arm from Whirl’s grasp, spinning to face him with his other arm coming up to swing like a blade through the air. He missed his target, only because Wheeljack saw it coming, and blocked the blow that would have met Whirl’s head. But it wasn’t enough.

Two cables, hidden in Soundwave’s chest, shot forward. One of them caught Wheeljack by the back of the neck, and with a disturbing amount of ease, lifted him from the floor. Wheeljack yelled out, reaching up to grab at the cable he hung from, and then suddenly he was flying through the air. He landed with a loud crash against the far wall.

“Wheeljack!” Ratchet was out of his booth in an instant, rushing to crouch down in front of his teammate.

Soundwave’s second cable wrapped around Whirl’s throat, lifting him as easily as it had lifted Wheeljack.

“Soundwave!” Megatron grabbed him by the shoulder, one arm wrapping around his torso entirely. “Soundwave, put him down. You don’t want to hurt him.”

Whirl let out a choked sound, claws desperately snapped at the cable. His optic flared, his legs kicking out under him.

Soundwave tightened his grip.

Megatron grunted as a sharp elbow connected with his stomach. He barely dodged the free cable as it swung back at him, ducking to one side just in time to avoid being the next victim of a strangle

hold.

“Fragging...freak!” Whirl gasped out.

Soundwave swung him to one side, then turned, using the extra momentum to add force as he threw Whirl. The table he landed on snapped, sending anyone who had been sitting at it scattering in all directions, and Whirl bounced once off the floor before coming to a stop beneath another.

Megatron grabbed Soundwave as he moved to grab for Whirl again, this time curling his sharpened digits around the cables themselves to keep them from extending any further.

“Soundwave, stop, listen to me, you’re safe-“

Soundwave grabbed him, using the length of cable he already had to wrap around his torso.

Swerve could only watch, optics wide and spark pounding, as Megatron went airborne, landing with a hard *crunch* against the bar.

How is he that strong!?

Soundwave turned, looking more than ready to brawl with his leader.

“What’s happening...what’s happening!?”

But neither Megatron offered an explanation.

“Soundwave, I don’t want to fight you,” Megatron stood slowly, holding himself defensively.

“Take a breath, you’re not where you think you are!”

“Don’t hold him back on my account!” Whirl tried to push himself from the floor, swearing loudly as he hit his head on the table on his way up. “C’mon, I can take him!”

“Whirl!” And this time it was Optimus’ voice, deep and sharp, “You have no idea what you have just done. Enough.”

“No, don’t!”

Megatron tried to call Soundwave back as he turned, drawn back to Whirl.

Swerve couldn’t see his face, that hadn’t changed, but he didn’t need to in order to know that Whirl might not survive the next few minutes.

The cables were moving again, and this time tables went flying; toward the bar, toward Megatron, toward Cyclonus and Ultra Magnus and any other bots who were beginning to step forward to interfere.

Tailgate cried out in fear as a chair splintered around Cyclonus’ arm.

Megs grabbed Swerve, dragging him from behind the bar and to the floor as a table came dangerously close to impaling him.

Whirl choked again as he was dragged off his pedes, one cable around his throat, the other dangerously tight around his torso.

Optimus’ battle mask snapped into place.

“Soundwave!”

And suddenly everything stopped.

Soundwave went still again, his head dropped to face the door.

The only sounds came from Whirl, struggling in his hold.

Swerve, following the lead of everyone else in the bar, turned toward the newest arrival.

Starscream stepped forward, his pedes clicking against the floor.

“What in the-“

“Sh...”

Swerve looked toward Megatron as he was shushed, but Megatron did not look away from Starscream.

“Soundwave,” Starscream’s voice was clear; calm and controlled, but oddly gentle. He walked forward without fear, without the wariness that Megatron and Optimus held themselves with, his optics firmly fixed on Soundwave.

The entire bar held its breath.

Starscream stopped just in front of Soundwave, his servos coming up to brush against the cables, “Let him go.”

“Whoa!” Whirl fell straight down as the cables suddenly released him, coiling back into their hidden compartments on Soundwave’s chest.

Since when does Soundwave listen to Starscream over Megatron? Swerve wanted to ask questions, but his glossa felt as if it had welded itself to the roof of his mouth.

Starscream didn’t spare a glance at the coughing, swearing mech behind him, his attention focused only on Soundwave, “You’re safe...”

There was silence as Soundwave seemed to hold Starscream’s gaze. It felt like it stretched on forever. The only indication that something was happening came from the small nod Starscream offered, the tiny, tight smile that crossed his face.

Finally, just when it felt like the silence would suffocate them all, Soundwave dipped his head. Starscream reached forward, the slightest of hesitations making him pause before he gently touched Soundwave’s arm.

“Perhaps a walk will be helpful. I’ll catch up with you.”

Soundwave nodded once. He turned to face Megatron, pausing again.

Megatron shook his head, “None required. Go.”

Swerve didn’t dare to even breathe as Soundwave began to silently walk out. None of this made sense; what had just set Soundwave off? Why was Starscream suddenly the hero here?

If his shock ever wore off, Swerve had so many questions to ask.

Soundwave paused as he came closer to the door, head turning toward Wheeljack, who still sat where he had landed, one servo up and curled around the back of his neck.

Ratchet looked up, watching Soundwave warily, “Now is not the time.”

Wheeljack shook his head jerkily, his optics squeezed shut. His servo clenched tighter against his plating, “Get away from me, Soundwave...”

Soundwave dipped his head again, then left, the door falling shut behind him.

“Easy, Wheeljack,” Ratchet turned back to his new patient. “Keep breathing,” He set his servo over Wheeljack’s free one, holding tight when Wheeljack suddenly gripped at him. “Stay with me...”

Is he hurt?

“What. Happened?” Starscream growled, the sudden hardness in his voice only serving to add to the tension.

“Whirl tried to start a fight...again,” Tailgate spoke up before Cyclonus could shush him.

“And what, exactly, did Whirl say?”

“I told him to apologize for running into me!”

“Hold on,” Rewind stood up from where he and Chromedome had taken cover, brushing himself off as he reviewed what he’d recorded. “Soundwave snapped after Whirl said, and I quote, ‘look at me and *speak*, you fragging drone’.”

Starscream paused, his gaze shooting up toward Megatron.

“Starscream, don’t-“

“You *glitch!*” Starscream spun on his heel, and Whirl hit the ground for a third time, this time with a loud shout of pain as two of Starscream’s sharpened digits clawed into his helm. Energon began to run down from the wounds, and dripped from Starscream’s servo.

“What the frag!?”

“If you *ever* speak to him like that again,” Starscream’s voice was a low snarl, dark with deadly promise, “I will take you apart, piece by piece, with my bare hands.”

Whirl looked up, his optic wide, and for the first time that night, he was silent.

Starscream glared down at him, wings stiff behind him, droplets of energon still dripping from his digits.

“Starscream,” Megatron stepped away from the bar, no longer wary. “Go tend to Soundwave. I’ll handle things here.”

Starscream’s wings twitched, but he did not move, or react in any way as Megatron moved closer.

“Starscream,” Megatron called his name again, voice firm, but lacking the anger Swerve was expecting. This time Starscream forced himself to look away from Whirl, instead moving to meet Megatron’s optics. Megatron nodded down at him. “Go.”

Starscream shot Whirl another heated glare. Swerve almost expected him to slash at him again, or maybe kick him. But he restrained himself, and with nothing more than a wordless growl, Starscream stalked out of the bar, following after Soundwave.

Megatron stood over Whirl now, his optics glowing like embers.

Swerve swallowed hard; he recognized that look. Hard, angry, with a little too much control. That look said danger, that look promised pain, and someone really needed to say something or else Whirl was going to be on the receiving end of every terrible thing that reflected in those optics, only Swerve suddenly couldn't find his voice and the bar was too quiet and *frag* was he really about to watch Whirl get murdered in his bar!?

"Megatron," Optimus called into the silence, his voice a soft warning.

And as if a spell had been broken, the controlled murderous fury disappeared. Megatron blinked, pulled his attention up and away from Whirl, and began to survey the damage.

"I apologize," Optimus turned to Rodimus and Ultra Magnus, "Soundwave has...been through more than most..."

"Uh, yeah, I...kinda guessed," Rodimus looked up to Ultra Magnus.

"I understand that this may be a sensitive topic, Optimus," Ultra Magnus brushed a broken piece of table from his arm, "but we cannot allow Cybertronians to lose control like this on the ship. Is this something that happens often?"

"No," Megatron answered him. "It is not."

Rodimus looked ready to speak again, but the sound of heavy pedesteps drew everyone's attention back to the door. It slid open, allowing Bulkhead to run inside.

"I got your call, Optimus, what happened?"

"Over here," Ratchet called for Bulkhead's attention. Bulkhead turned to him, his optics wide.

"Jackie..." he rushed over, kneeling down quickly. "What happened?"

"Soundwave grabbed him by the neck," Ratchet gave Bulkhead a look full of meaning that Swerve didn't understand, "with his cable."

"Frag..."

"I can hear you both, you know," Wheeljack tried and failed to smile, and Bulkhead gently set a servo on his shoulder.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm...no," Wheeljack shook his head again, his optics still held tightly shut. His servo shook, and he clapped it down tighter against his neck. "No, I'm...I need...out of here. I need to get out of here. Bulkhead..."

"I've got him, Ratch," Bulkhead stood up, servos curling carefully around Wheeljack's arms.

"C'mon, easy does it..."

The bar was silent again as Bulkhead helped Wheeljack to his pedes. Wheeljack shook, his knees threatening to buckle under him, but Bulkhead held him steady, and soon they were moving for the

door.

“Smokescreen,” Optimus turned toward the youngest of his Autotbots, who looked more shaken up than some of the Lost Lighters, “you do not need to stay.”

“I’m alright, sir,” Smokescreen swallowed. “I’ll stay here...”

“Optimus, I have to ask...”

“I know, Ultra Magnus, I know,” Optimus turned to Megatron. “They deserve an explanation.”

Megatron swore under his breath, something harsh and rough that sounded familiar, but Swerve couldn’t quite translate. He kicked at a chunk of table, and Swerve started when Megs tightened his grip around his arm.

“Megatron-“

“I heard you.”

Swerve looked up at Megs, swallowing slightly when his gaze was returned. Megs looked just as confused as he was; no internal insight as to what was going on in his Other self’s head, then.

“Is Starscream the best person to send after Soundwave?” Megs looked away from Swerve, moving to stand at his full height as he looked toward Megatron. “Speaking from my own experience, I don’t quite see Starscream being the one to help him.”

There was something in his voice, a soft bit of reasoning at the end of his question.

Is he trying to get Megatron to leave? It would make sense; he was obviously aggravated, and hinting that Soundwave might need him would be a good way to get him out...

“Starscream’s presence will be much more soothing for Soundwave than mine would be,” Megatron said, sounding distracted.

“Really?” Swerve’s glossa finally worked its way free, and he couldn’t help but voice his surprise as he pulled himself back to his pedes. “Starscream having a soothing presence, that’s not something I’d expect from...” Swerve trailed off as his mind suddenly threw several details together. Starscream and Soundwave always standing together in the bar. Laserbeak bolting straight for Starscream whenever he was free to roam around the ship. The gentle way Starscream had reached for Soundwave just now. “Oh...oh...no...”

Megatron looked at him, one optic ridge raised. Swerve’s jaw dropped.

“Oh, no way...Starscream and Soundwave?!”

“Ahem!” Ultra Magnus shot Swerve an unamused look that withered his shock. “Optimus, Megatron; Soundwave losing his temper?”

Optimus and Megatron exchanged heavy looks; Swerve could see the exhaustion that suddenly seemed to settle over their shoulders. Ratchet looked at the ground, one servo curling into a fist.

“Swerve,” Smokescreen’s voice was quiet and subdued, and when Swerve turned to face him, he was caught off guard by the haunted, almost scared, expression he wore. “You might want to get some drinks going...”

“Huh?”

Optimus turned back to Ultra Magnus, his voice somber, “Is your universe familiar with any type of slave coding?”

“*What* coding?” Rodimus looked between them, optics wide.

“That would be a no, I assume,” Megatron looked at Optimus again. “Where should we start?”

“Swerve,” Megs murmured, “I think I have to agree with Smokescreen...”

“Yeah,” Swerve nodded, mouth suddenly going dry. “Yeah, drinks coming up...”

He made his way back behind the bar, a knot of apprehension settling in his tank as Optimus began to speak.

What in the Pit happened to these guys?

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Part Two: SoundStar softness

This shouldn't be happening.

It was a mantra, playing on loop in his head.

This shouldn't be happening.

This shouldn't be happening.

This shouldn't be happening.

He shouldn't be losing control.

He shouldn't be letting the words of an overcharged stranger, who he would never see again once this was over, send him over the edge.

He shouldn't be this worked up.

He shouldn't still feel the sting from long healed wounds.

But he did. And he was.

This shouldn't be happening.

This shouldn't be hap-.

Laserbeak pinged him; the wordless reach full of worry. Soundwave pinged back distractedly.

Wheeljack will be angry with me.

And he would deserve the anger. What he'd done, after what they had gone through together...

Laserbeak pinged him again, more insistent this time.

Soundwave tried to force himself not to think. If he could just focus on his steps, calm and unhurried, or on the numbers on the doors he passed, if he could just focus on something else, he would be okay.

But it was hard to push away Whirl's words.

I said speak, Soundwave.

Harder still when the voice that repeated them in his head was not Whirl's.

I got away. We got away. I am not there.

His spark pounded regardless. He still felt as if he were walking through a fog.

Broken

When had the ringing in his audials started?

Useless

No.

Do you honestly think-

No!

He felt numb. Flashes of fangs and spilled energon and pain pulled at his memory.

I am on a ship called the Lost Light, in a different universe. I am not in danger. I am not in-

You will be returning to Megatron a broken, useless drone!

“Soundwave!”

The voice in Soundwave’s head fell silent as he snapped back to reality. Soundwave blinked behind his visor. When had he stopped moving?

The sounds of sharp pedes, and the touch of an EM field brimming with fury that Soundwave knew was not aimed at him, told Soundwave who had called to him. As if any other voice had been able to pull him out of his own mind recently.

Starscream...

“Overcharged pile of rusted scrap deserved worse,” Starscream didn’t stop walking until he stood in front of Soundwave, his optics flicking over him as if he was searching for something. “Are you alright?”

Soundwave wanted to nod. He wanted to play something, to tell Starscream he was fine. But nothing happened; his body refused to move the way he wanted it to, and suddenly his audio files felt out of reach. He couldn’t...he couldn’t move, he couldn’t speak, it felt like something was binding him in place and he couldn’t shake it loose, almost like...like...

“Soundwave,” Starscream reached out and touched his arm. “Soundwave, you’re shaking.”

Was he? Yes, there it was. Now that Starscream was touching him, Soundwave could feel the way his arm trembled against his digits.

That was new.

Starscream frowned, and Soundwave felt another flare of anger surge through his field. Whirl wouldn’t be safe for the next few days, that much was certain.

Sharp digits slid down his arm, moving to curl around his servo. Starscream tugged lightly, “Come.”

And Soundwave followed, spindly digits wrapping over Starscream’s as he was led down the hall to the habsuite they had been given.

The door slid shut behind them. A faint beep indicated the lock being set, and then Starscream was facing him again, still holding his servo tight.

“What do you need?”

Soundwave took a step forward, distancing himself from the wall, the door, and pulled Starscream closer. He needed this. Just this. Starscream close and Laserbeak against his chest, as he should be.

Starscream followed his lead without objection, leaning in to press his forehelm against Soundwave's. He released his servo, moving to instead trace the very tips of his digits over the wide expanse of Soundwave's arms, drawing nonsense patterns over flat, polished plating.

Breathe. Soundwave forced his vents to keep working. The wounds were gone, erased, and Starscream would not hurt him.

Starscream drew the back of his digits, smooth and blunt and cool against Soundwave's plating, down his upper arm, and Soundwave felt himself relax.

“Better...” Starscream murmured.

Better... Soundwave agreed. He reached for Starscream's other servo, moving to link their digits together, only to pause when he felt something wet. Starscream went still, and Soundwave leaned his head back just a little as he pulled Starscream's servo up where he could see it. Starscream's expression had gone hard, his jaw set and his chin raised ever so slightly, as if daring Soundwave to challenge him. Behind his mask, Soundwave raised an optic ridge.

Energon, pink and bright, stained the tips of two of Starscream's digits. Soundwave examined them for a moment longer than he really had to before turning back to Starscream.

“He doesn't get to talk to you like that,” Starscream said, voice filled with conviction. “No one gets to talk to you like that.”

An overwhelming fondness warmed Soundwave's spark, and he allowed his field to glow with the feeling. Starscream scoffed at the touch of it, but Soundwave could see the way he fought not to smile, the little bit of pride that tried to spark in his optics.

Soundwave linked their digits together, properly this time, and wrote out a pattern they were both familiar with against Starscream's servo, gratitude swirling through his field.

Starscream rolled his optics, his other servo resuming its nonsense tracing, “You've gone soft, do you know that? I give Laserbeak a bit of kindness, help you through a single hardship, and look at you. Softer than a mercury cake.”

Soundwave smiled behind his mask. His speakers clicked as he sorted through his recordings.

“Don't be an aft.”

Starscream laughed. Soundwave pressed their forehelms together again.

“Are you alright?”

Soundwave nodded once. Yes, he was alright now.

“Separate berths tonight?”

Soundwave shook his head slightly. No, not tonight.

Starscream's field pulsed with understanding.

“Ready when you are...”

Soundwave nodded again, squeezed Starscream’s servo, and closed his optics. The room was quiet. Starscream continued his gentle tracing.

Laserbeak pinged.

Better?

Soundwave pinged back immediately.

Much better...

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